

Chapter 2

Historical Considerations



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Fun to Know

Beaver felt hats were prized possessions among European men during the 1700s and early 1800s. They were expensive to make. The beaver were captured in North America and shipped a long distance to reach Europe. The manufacturing process was complex.



FWS Photo

Kit Fox



Content Standard - *Students use knowledge of history, public attitudes about wildlife, and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation to understand regulated trapping as a legitimate activity*



Students become aware of the fur trade's role in the exploration and settlement of North America

Human's use of furs and furbearers began thousands of years ago. Native Americans made use of many different hides and furs. They were used for clothing, tools, bedding, and housing. Furs were also used like money. Fur trading among tribes was common long before Europeans came to North America.

When Europeans first came to North America, they were impressed by the abundance of furbearers. They quickly began trading with the Native Americans for furs. These were shipped back to be sold in Europe. The demand for new sources of fur started much of the exploration of Michigan. French or British furtraders were often the first whites to make contact with Native American tribes.

The Great Lakes region was important to the fur trading history of America. Before the European settlers came, no roads existed. Thick forests made land travel difficult. The lakes and rivers provided main routes of travel. Michigan is surrounded by water, with many large rivers starting deep inland. It became a hub of fur trading because of the easy travel on the Great Lakes and rivers.

The first European fur traders entering the Great Lakes were French Canadians. Medard Chouart Sieur De Groseville and Pierre Radisson set sail in June 1658 to make their fortune in furs. They stayed the next two years spending the winter of 1658-1659 at the site of Sault Ste. Marie. At the end of two years they returned to Quebec with sixty canoes of pelts. The first North American fur trading post had been established in Quebec by French explorer Samuel De Champlain in 1608.

These first trips opened the way for other traders. Most of these were "free traders", traders working for themselves. These traders were known as Cou-

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reurs de bois (woods-runners). They worked as migrant traders traveling throughout the state trading with any group of interested Native Americans. They competed with voyageurs (traders) hired by licensed trading companies.

Other traders preferred to build permanent trading posts. These posts were important to opening new areas to settlement. Sault Ste. Marie became the first established trading site in Michigan. The following years saw the establishment of other trading centers including Detroit, Michilimackinac, and St. Joseph. Years later all these sites would be best known for other industries. They all began as fur trading centers. Other cities such as New York, Chicago, and St. Louis also started as trading posts.

The fur trade was essential to life in the Great Lakes frontier. Native Americans and trappers used furs just like we use money today. The most important pelt was the beaver. Anything bought or sold was given a value in beaver pelts. Blankets were marked with stripes indicating their value in beaver pelts. A good rifle might cost a trapper as many as ten beaver pelts. All other pelts were also valued in beaver pelts.

The French and Indian War was fought over the fur trade in the Great Lakes. France lost and was forced to turn over the fur trade to England. The primary British trading posts remained at Michilimackinac and Detroit with a smaller post located at St Joseph. England controlled the land until the Revolutionary war. The treaty of Paris turned over all British lands east of the Mississippi River to the United States of America. The British were not eager to turn over their rich fur trade in the Great Lakes. They kept their posts at Michilimackinac and Detroit until 1796.

Several well known men made their fortunes in the fur trade. John Jacob Astor joined the fur business shortly after the war of 1812. Astor purchased the North West Company and changed its name to the American Fur Company. Its headquarters were located on Mackinac Island. From this spot Astor's company grew to control the entire fur trade in the Great Lakes region and beyond.

As Astor's company grew, the competition for fur increased. Furbearer populations began to be reduced. Many furbearers common to Michigan were either restricted to remote areas or eliminated. The beaver, otter, and muskrat, once abundant throughout the Michigan area, were only found in the hardest to reach places. Other furbearer populations like marten and fisher were gone.

The greed of the fur companies wasn't the only impact on furbearer populations. Widespread habitat destruction played a key role. The new settlers who followed the trading posts also lacked a "Conservation Ethic." People believed that resources were unlimited. Uncontrolled harvest by the fur traders



Two kinds of beaver were used to make felt hats. At first, coat beaver were preferred. These were furs that had been worn by Native Americans until the guard hairs wore off.

Parchment beaver were prime pelts, but for a long time they had to be shipped to Russia for processing to remove the guard hairs. Eventually French and English hat makers discovered the Russian secrets and began to use parchment beaver for all their felt hats. The final blow to the early fur trade came when silk hats gained popularity in Europe.



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Beaver

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Great Hinckley Hunt, 1818

On December 24, 1818, 600 armed men encircled Hinckley Township in NE Ohio. They marched toward a central point and shot 300 deer, 21 bears, 17 wolves, plus hundreds of turkey, fox, and raccoons. This was an effort to exterminate all the wildlife.



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was just one example. During the early 1800s, millions of acres of wetlands were drained, forests were cleared for farms, and prairies were plowed under. Streams and rivers ran heavy with silt, sewage, and industrial waste. In the East, nearly all species of fish and wildlife were in decline. The government did not regulate seasons or methods that could be used to take wildlife.

Three years before Michigan became a state in 1837, furbearer populations had been severely reduced. Astor sold his company, the “golden Age” of fur trading had ended. The major reason for the fur industry decline was due more to fashion than declining populations. The beaver felt hat so popular at the time was being replaced by silk top hats. The demand for beaver dropped dramatically.

Steel traps did not play a major role in the development of the fur trade or the widespread declines of beaver, otters, and other furbearers. Steel traps were not mass produced or widely available until after 1823.

Today the harvest of furbearers is regulated. Data on population abundance, life history, and habitat condition guide laws and harvest. The first record of any harvest control occurred in the 1830s. The Territorial Muskrat Act passed in 1833 created a closed season on muskrat. The first law identifying game animals and furbearers was passed by the Michigan legislature in 1869. A trapping license was added in 1928 to provide monies to support wildlife management. The trapping license was expanded in 1980 to include both trapping and hunting of furbearers.



Students recognize that fish and wildlife resources are publicly owned, and managed according to society’s laws, values, and attitudes

In North America, wildlife is a public resource, owned by no individual. State and federal wildlife agencies manage wildlife for the benefit of all people. Public values and attitudes about wildlife determine how it can be used. Since the first European contact, people’s attitudes about wildlife have changed.

People sometimes have conflicting attitudes about the way wildlife should be used or managed. The most serious conflicts are among people who have different views about killing wildlife. However, even people who hold similar views may disagree on how animals such as furbearers should be managed.

Attitudes and Values

The values people place on wildlife underlie their attitudes about when and

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how animals may be used. People who use wildlife for subsistence may revere animals even though they harvest wildlife for food and clothing. People who misuse or try to exterminate wildlife do not value animals at all until they are dead.

Conservationists place the highest values on preserving habitats, ecosystems, and sustainable wildlife populations. Conservationists accept regulated harvests of surplus animals as appropriate.

Strict protectionists value individual animals. They tend to oppose hunting and trapping out of concern for individual animals. Some protectionists have a mistaken belief that hunting and trapping will threaten the entire population.

Animal rights activists believe all animals have the same rights as humans. They oppose any human use of animals and may value an animal's life as much as a human life.

Subsistence Attitude

Prior to European influence wildlife was a source of food, clothing, and tools for Native Americans. They had few crops to grow, and no livestock. The lives of plants and wild animals were spiritually and culturally connected to the lives of native peoples.

Later, pioneers such as Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton depended on wildlife as they opened up new territory for settlement. Today, only a few people totally depend on wildlife for subsistence.

Utilitarian Attitude

European settlers and Native Americans alike viewed wildlife as a common resource. No one owned wildlife until they killed it. Some people made their living by killing animals for fur, meat, or feathers. At the time there were no government agencies to manage and protect wildlife.

Extermination Attitude

When people started farming in the wilderness, wildlife became a nuisance. Bears, wolves, and mountain lions were a threat to people or livestock. Deer, raccoon, and squirrels damaged crops. Farmers shot wildlife, or paid others to do it. Government agencies paid bounties on many animals.

Market "Hunters"

Before wildlife was protected by seasons and bag limits, market "hunters" killed millions of animals a year to supply food to restaurants and grocery stores. Market "hunters" had a strict "utilitarian" attitude toward wildlife. They were not "hunters" according to today's meaning of the word.



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Sport Hunters

The term “sport hunter” arose in the United States during the mid-1800s to distinguish those who practiced “fair chase” hunting techniques from commercial “market hunters.” Sport hunters placed limits on themselves and their hunting methods in order to test their skills and give animals a reasonable opportunity to escape. The code of the sportsman arose to define proper conduct for hunters.



Silvertip Productions

During the 1800s former military officers sometimes organized “armies” to conduct “wars of extermination” on wild animals. Communities held events to see who could kill the most wildlife on a given day or weekend. Widespread events could result in tens of thousands of animals being killed in a single day.

Conservation Attitude

By the mid-1800s, many people no longer depended on wildlife for survival. Some began to enjoy hunting, fishing, and camping as leisure activities. Habitat destruction, market hunting, and extermination efforts were reducing animal populations. As wildlife became scarce, conservation became a concern for hunters. Conservationists wanted to save critical habitats and remaining populations of wildlife. There was no scientific knowledge about wildlife management. It took decades to create natural resource agencies and funding sources. Leaders such as President Theodore Roosevelt, a hunter, created public support for wildlife and a conservation ethic.

Today, wildlife conservation programs are based upon sustainable use. Individual animals may be used in accordance with laws, while habitats and animal populations are preserved. Many people, including hunters and trappers, are conservationists who care about wildlife while recognizing that regulated use is beneficial to society and the resource.

Preservation Attitude

Many people value wildlife but they fail to see the positive connection between hunting and trapping, and sustainable populations. Preservationists may oppose hunting and trapping in the belief it endangers animals. However, many preservationists are open-minded, and willing to examine facts about wildlife management.

Animal Rights Attitude

A small but highly vocal group of Americans believe animals should have rights. The primary concern of Animal Rights advocates is the moral obligation of people. They believe animals should have the same legal rights as humans and therefore oppose any human use of animals including hunting, trapping, farming practices, research on animals, rodeos, circuses, horse races, and other animal-related activities. Some animal rights proponents even oppose owning animals as pets.



Apathetic Attitude

A high percentage of the American public is growing up with little connection to the land. Few of these people think about wildlife on a daily basis, and most have no personal experience that would help shape their attitude. If they encounter wildlife doing damage to their property, they may want it exterminated or removed. If someone shows them pictures of animals in traps and claims it is cruel, they may oppose trapping or vote to make it illegal. An apathetic person's attitude can be easily changed, but they may not spend much time considering the issues.

Animal Welfare

Most Americans, including those who trap, care about animal welfare. A person concerned with animal welfare wants to minimize pain and suffering when animals are trapped, or used any other way. Whereas, a person who believes in animal rights believes animals have a right not to be trapped at all.

Most trappers are concerned with animal welfare. Those who are not are unlikely to be accepted by other trappers.

Wildlife agencies are concerned about sustainable long-term populations and individual animal welfare. Many trapping regulations are enacted to improve animal welfare. Agencies regulate types of traps that may be used, where they may be set, seasons, and how often traps must be checked. Trapper education programs play a role in animal welfare, too.

One of the most important efforts to improve animal welfare is known as the Best Management Practices project. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has spent years working with wildlife agencies, trappers, veterinarians, universities, and other groups to develop Best Management Practices. This project is ongoing, and provides information used in this Trapper Education Manual.

Some people oppose any use of animals, including human consumption of meat, fish, eggs, and milk.



Silvertip Productions

Meats



FWS Photo

Bobcat



Students identify key components of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation

The United States and Canada have the most successful system of wildlife management the world has ever known. Conservationists, especially hunters and trappers, supported the development of The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. This model is defined by seven principles:

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Tragedy of the Commons

The “Tragedy of the Commons” relates to common resources that are available to all. In this situation, the greediest will gain the most, for a time. Restrictions on use of common resources are necessary to prevent overuse by individuals that could result in the loss of these resources to society.



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Red Fox



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Muskrat

Furbearers are not considered to be migratory. State fish and wildlife agencies are responsible for managing furbearers.

Wildlife as a Public Trust Resource

Legally, wildlife is a public resource, held in trust by the government, and managed by fish and wildlife agencies. State wildlife agencies are responsible for most wildlife management and regulation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has authority over migratory birds and federally endangered species. The Service works cooperatively with the states and other nations.

Elimination of Markets for Wildlife

The elimination of commercial killing (market hunting) of most wildlife for meat, feathers, or other uses was critical in halting the decline of many wildlife species (continuation of market hunting could have resulted in a “tragedy of the commons”). Furbearers are an exception. Using regulated trapping, furbearer populations will sustain a commercial market and provide significant benefits to society.

Allocation of Wildlife by Law

Public privileges to use wildlife and have a say in its management are guaranteed by law. Hunting and trapping privileges are not restricted to wealthy landowners or granted as special considerations. Individuals can lose their privileges if they violate laws pertaining to the legal harvest of wildlife.

Wildlife May Be Killed Only for a Legitimate Purpose

Killing wildlife for frivolous reasons is prohibited by law. If society is going to sanction the killing of wildlife, it must be for a legitimate purpose such as using the animal or its parts for food, clothing, medicine, or property protection.

Wildlife Is Considered an International Resource

The Migratory Bird Treaty of 1916 between the United States and Canada was the world’s first significant international treaty for the management of wildlife. Today, waterfowl, songbirds, and other migratory wildlife benefit from international management and regulation. The taking of certain wildlife species, such as bobcat and otter, also are regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). For more information on CITES, please visit www.cites.org.



Science is the Proper Tool for Discharge of Wildlife Policy

Science has been the primary basis for wildlife restoration and management, and the formation of the wildlife profession. North Americans used wildlife science as a basis for managing wildlife decades ahead of everyone else in the world.

Democracy of Hunting and Trapping

In North America, everyone has the opportunity to participate in regulated hunting and trapping. President Theodore Roosevelt wrote about the societal gains to be made by keeping land available for hunting for all people. This is very different from a model that existed for centuries in Europe, where wealthy people owned wildlife and the land, and only the wealthy could fish and hunt. In North America, wildlife is owned by the public, and responsible citizens have equal opportunities to participate in regulated hunting or trapping.

Hunters and trappers provide the funding for wildlife management programs and the purchase of critical habitats through license fees and special taxes on firearms, handguns, ammunition, and archery equipment. When they join together with a common purpose, hunters and trappers are a political force speaking out in favor of wildlife conservation.

Thanks to conservation-minded hunters and trappers, species such as elk, deer, geese, wild turkeys, wood ducks, beaver, bald eagles, and river otters are more numerous today than they were in 1900. Hunters, trappers, and other conservationists were the first people to place a value on living wildlife. As a result, wildlife is now managed as a public resource to be conserved for the benefit of all.



Students use their knowledge of history, public attitudes about wildlife, and the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation to participate in discussions about regulated trapping and the role of trappers in today's society

Think about each of the people in the following scenarios and the attitudes they may have about furbearers and trapping. What would you do in this situation? If you could talk to the people, what would you say? What might change their feelings? If everyone in your community had the same attitudes about wildlife, what might happen as a result?

Conservation Pledge

I give my pledge as an American to save and faithfully to defend from waste the natural resources of my country—
its air,
its soil and minerals,
its forests,
waters, and
wildlife.



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Coyote

Historical Considerations



Bobcat

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River Otter

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Note that some of the items that you may want to consider are provided in Appendix A. However, please do not turn to these pages until after you have considered the points listed above. If you are in a classroom setting, wait for the instructor to tell you to look at the appendix.

Scenario 1: *You stop at a roadside stand where a farmer sells fruits and vegetables. You overhear a customer say “Why is your sweet corn so expensive this year?” The farmer says “Raccoons have eaten nearly half my corn. I never saw so much damage.”*

Scenario 2: *Your family has trapped on several properties in your neighborhood for many years. One property with two large ponds was sold to a family from another state. A month before trapping season opens you stop by to introduce yourself. A young child waves at you as you pull in the drive. As you get out of the car you notice a bumper sticker on the car in front of you. It says “Real Men Don’t Eat Meat.” The front door opens and a young man steps out to check on the child.*

Scenario 3: *You take your dog to the vet for annual shots. While you are waiting a woman rushes in crying and holding a badly injured dog. She tells the receptionist her dog is dying after being attacked by a coyote.*

Scenario 4: *You are sitting in a restaurant having lunch. You overhear a conversation at the table next to you. It sounds like the three men sitting there are poaching deer and selling the meat, but you aren’t sure. Sometimes their talk sounds like it is in code. When you leave the restaurant there is a truck parked next to you. You see a spotlight on the seat. As you back out you notice blood and deer hair on the bumper.*

